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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000432

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SUBJECT: FRANCE/SOUTH AFRICA: SARKOZY'S VISIT AND HIS  
AFRICA POLICY

REF: CAPE TOWN 47

PARIS 00000432 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d  
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: French President Sarkozy's February 28-29 visit to South Africa was a success, with both sides taking steps to further the strategic partnership they seek to develop, MFA South Africa deskoff Frederic Chole said on March 6. Sarkozy set forth his vision of France's policy towards Africa during his February 28 address to the South African Parliament in Cape Town, although Chole said that the French press tended to focus on the changes in France's military presence in Africa rather than on the broader partnership France hopes to develop between Europe and Africa. The two sides agreed on a number of economic, environmental, and energy projects. Sarkozy also met with ANC leader Jacob Zuma and Nelson Mandela, and, with Mrs. Sarkozy, managed some free time away from the media glare. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Frederic Chole, MFA deskoff for South Africa, on March 6 provided an overview of President Sarkozy's February 28-29 visit to South Africa. Chole described the visit as a complete success from the French perspective and said that it marked an important step in France's quest to build its relationship with South Africa into one of strategic importance for both sides.

#### Background

¶3. (C) French interest in South Africa had been building steadily for some time, Chole noted, but the real impetus for the visit came when President Mbeki, in writing, lauded Sarkozy's July 26 Africa policy speech, delivered in Dakar, which called for an end to European paternalism and African dependence. Mbeki believed that Sarkozy said some things that needed to be said, and which Africans needed to hear, about self-reliance and an end to the post-colonial pattern of dependency. The speech sparked controversy, as well, for its bluntness and for what some observers deemed its notably paternal tone.

¶4. (C) Confirming what we had heard earlier, Chole said that the Dakar speech had been drafted by Sarkozy's Special Advisor Henri Guaino, who enjoys a great deal of independence and can operate outside the usual GOF bureaucratic channels. Chole said that Guaino's Dakar speech was not vetted by either Diplomatic Advisor Jean-David Levitte and the Africanists at the Presidency (Levitte's deputy Bruno Joubert

or the two staff AF-advisors, Romain Serman and Remi Marechaux) or by the Africa Bureau at the MFA. Thus, provocative passages in the speech were not removed, which made the Dakar speech more troublesome than it needed to be. As a result, subsequent speeches by Sarkozy on Africa (at the Lisbon EU-Africa Summit and the Cape Town speech) were more carefully vetted. Chole was certain that the Cape Town speech was drafted by Marechaux and reviewed by Levitte and Joubert.

#### The Cape Town Speech

15. (C) Although Chole offered the caveat that his comments on the speech represented his perspective as South Africa deskoff, he noted that the Cape Town speech was consistent with Sarkozy's stated intention to transform France-Africa, and hopefully Europe-Africa, relations into a more balanced and transparent partnership of equals and thus to move beyond the cycle of paternalism and dependence characteristic of the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. He noted that the press had tended to focus on Sarkozy's idea of redefining France's military presence in Africa -- "which is natural because our military presence carries great symbolic value" -- rather than on the forward-looking partnership arrangement Sarkozy wanted to develop. (NOTE: We will report separately on France's evolving policy towards Africa in terms of French objectives and likelihood of success. END NOTE.)

#### Bilateral Matters

16. (C) While the speech was intended to be the centerpiece of Sarkozy's visit and indeed captured most of the headlines, Chole said that the two sides agreed on a number of other important issues. Notably, he said that France and South Africa agreed to assist the Central African Republic with security sector reform in order to improve the C.A.R.'s

PARIS 00000432 002 OF 003

police and gendarmerie. Chole said that this was a first for both countries in terms of partnering together to assist a third country in security-related areas. The two sides agreed to work together on such issues as UN Security Council enlargement (although without explicitly calling for a permanent UNSC seat for South Africa), climate change, increased contact in the form of visits and economic cooperation, and the energy sector. With respect to the latter, France and French energy companies AREVA and EDF offered to provide technical assistance to South Africa, which, Chole said, had recently suffered electrical blackouts that led to criticism of the government. The two sides took steps as well to cooperate in the nuclear energy sector ("for civilian purposes, of course," Chole added).

#### Comoros

17. (C) On one issue of shared concern, the Comoros and Colonel Bacar's seizure of Anjouan, Chole said that the South Africans seemed to be retreating from the leadership role that they had once been playing. Chole reported that the situation in the Comoros did not play a prominent role in Sarkozy's discussions, and he sensed increasing reticence on South Africa's part to maintain a high level of engagement in resolving the Anjouan crisis. He was not certain why South African influence had waned but suggested that perhaps the South Africans wanted to disassociate themselves from what could turn into an ugly and prolonged problem if Bacar chose to defy the international community.

#### Personalities

18. (C) Despite Mbeki's letter approving what Sarkozy said in Dakar, Chole said that the two leaders had not known each other well before the visit. Chole said that Mbeki at first gave the impression of being somewhat "cold and reserved" but "warmed up a bit" during the course of the visit so that the two were on amiable terms by its conclusion. Chole noted

that Mbeki and other South African leaders envision a regional, if not global, role for South Africa but acknowledge that it needs the help of partners such as France to achieve that goal. They were thus more than receptive to the broader partnership France was suggesting. Chole said that several of the bilateral projects the two sides agreed to undertake came at the suggestion of the South Africans.

¶9. (C) Sarkozy also met with ANC leader Jacob Zuma. The meeting, Chole reported, was cordial but the two did not go into much depth and spoke in general terms. Unlike the assessment reported reftel concerning Zuma's legal problems and the possibility that he could go to jail, Chole expressed the belief that as South Africa's presumptive next president, Zuma would find some way to avoid such a fate and that the political system would not permit the debacle of the ANC's chosen leader falling into disgrace. Chole acknowledged that this was his personal assessment, conceding that another scenario involving Zuma's political demise could certainly develop.

¶10. (C) Sarkozy, accompanied by France's First Lady Carla Bruni, also paid a courtesy call on Nelson Mandela. Chole said that the event was essentially a photo op and a chance for Sarkozy to pay his respects to this historic and world-class statesman. Chole reported that Mandela, while still very sharp mentally, seemed physically "tired." There was very little substantive discussion but it was important for Sarkozy to meet and honor the great man.

#### Difficult Stage Management

¶11. (C) Although the trip went very well, Chole said that it had been very difficult to organize, particularly because of the uncertainty of whether Sarkozy would stop in Chad before going to South Africa, an issue decided literally at the last minute. This left the South Africa schedule in limbo far beyond the norm for such events, making both the French and South Africans nervous. Mrs. Sarkozy's separate South Africa program was on hold as well pending the decision on Chad. France's First Couple, as had been speculated, were able to enjoy some private time in South Africa after the official part of the visit concluded, and Chole said they deliberately did so out of the media's view, so as not to repeat one of Sarkozy's early faux pas, when he quite publicly cavorted on a luxury yacht shortly after his election in May 2007. Chole said that he himself had to scramble a bit when Finance Minister Christine Lagarde,

PARIS 00000432 003.2 OF 003

standing next to Chole, slipped, sprained her ankle, and fell completely off the stand at an event, which required a quick trip to the hospital and a moment of high concern. Lagarde, a former Olympic swimmer, was not seriously injured and carried out her role in the visit with aplomb, Chole reported.

¶12. (U) RESOURCES: For copies of Sarkozy's speech and other texts associated with the visit, please request them by unclassified e-mail (kanedarj@state.gov).

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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